

Norovirus Fact Sheet

What is norovirus?

Norovirus are a group of viruses that cause viral gastroenteritis (“stomach flu”). Norovirus is also commonly known as Norwalk or the “cruise ship disease”.

What are the symptoms of norovirus?

Symptoms of norovirus include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramping. People may also have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. Onset of symptoms is usually sudden and occurs within 12 to 48 hours after exposure to norovirus.

How serious is norovirus disease?

Most people get better within one or two days and have no long-term health effects from the illness. However, dehydration (loss of fluids) can occur and may result in hospitalization.

How is norovirus spread?

Norovirus is found in the stool or vomit of infected people. It is very contagious and people can become infected with the virus in several ways, including:

- having direct contact with another person who is infected and showing symptoms;
- touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus, and then placing their hand in their mouth; or
- eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with the virus.

Norovirus can spread quickly in places with close living quarters, childcare centers and long-term care facilities. People who work in these types of facilities should carefully follow steps to prevent the spread of infection.

Can food or water cause norovirus?

Outbreaks have occurred from eating uncooked oysters. Cooking the oysters kills the virus. Drinking contaminated water can also be a source of these viruses.

When and for how long is a person able to spread norovirus?

People infected with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to, at least, 3 days after symptoms end. People with norovirus should not return to work for at least 48 hours after the cessation of symptoms, 72 hours if they work in a sensitive occupation (food handler, day care provider, health care provider). Children can return to school or daycare 3 days after symptoms end.

What treatment is available for people with norovirus infection?

Currently, there is no specific medication or vaccine for norovirus. Norovirus infection cannot be treated with antibiotics. Drinking fluids, such as juice or water, can reduce the chance of becoming dehydrated.

What can be done to prevent the spread of norovirus?

- Frequent handwashing with warm water and soap
- Promptly disinfecting contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners
- Washing soiled clothing and linens
- Avoiding food or water from sources that may be contaminated
- Cooking oysters completely to kill the virus



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